Tips for Creating Sensory Friendly Museum Programs

1. Make your visitors feel welcome.
   - Create a judgement-free environment. This is the most important thing you can do to make your program sensory friendly.
     - Be sure that staff and volunteers know what to expect, and what is expected of them.
     - Train your staff to understand the nature of sensory sensitivities:
       - Learn how sensitivities to light, sound, smells, and other stimuli affect perception and behavior.
       - Sensory sensitivities are not anyone’s fault.
     - Focus on your visitors, and interact with them. Smile. Say “hi.”
       - Avoid side conversations when visitors are in the room.
     - Be aware of body language!
       - Families of children with sensory sensitivities may be over-sensitized to critical glances. Don’t imagine that you can mask your disapproval.
   - Ask what you can offer to help your visitor fully participate, and LISTEN to the answer.
   - DO NOT ask the nature or name of a person’s disability or impairment.

2. Broaden your communication skills.
   - Be prepared to show, not just tell. Use pictures and props.
   - Keep it simple, but don’t dumb it down.
   - Speak directly to each individual, not through an aide or interpreter.
   - Be literal. Avoid phrases like “swing around this way” unless you have an actual swing.
   - Be patient. Allow time for the person to formulate an answer. Wait. Patiently.

3. Value diversity
   - Listen, respect, and emulate the ways in which people self-identify.
   - Become fluent in person-first language.
   - Develop meaningful relationships in the community.
   - Think of abilities as skill sets. Some people sing opera, or do back-flips on balance beams, or walk, or paint, or dance. Others not so much.
   - Not all impairments are disabling. Disability is created in the intersection of an impairment and an environment.
   - Think inclusively. Most of us, at some time in our lives, will develop some kind of impairment and will experience disability.
   - Celebrate the many ways in which the museum experience is enriched by the diverse qualities that characterize your visitors, volunteers, artists, and staff.

4. Don’t Assume
   - Anything
   - Ever
   - Always ask questions.